

I've Been Working On The Railroad

Traditional American Folk Song

The musical score is written for guitar and voice. It consists of ten staves of music, each with a line of lyrics underneath. Chords are indicated by letters (G, C, D7, A7, B7) above the staff lines. The key signature is one sharp (F#), and the time signature is common time (C). The melody is primarily composed of eighth and quarter notes, with some triplets and rests. The lyrics are as follows:

I've been work-ing on the rail - road all the live-long day;
I've been work - ing on the rail - road just to pass the time a - way.
Can't you hear the whis-tle blow - ing? Rise up so ear - ly in the morn.
Can't you hear the cap - tain shout - ing, "Di - nah, blow your horn!"
Di-nah won't you blow, Di-nah won't you blow, Di-nah won't you blow your horn? —
Di-nah won't you blow, Di-nah won't you blow, Di-nah won't you blow your horn?
Some-one's in the kitch-en with Di - nah, Some-one's in the kitch-en I know, —
Some-one's in the kitch-en with Di - nah, Strum-min' on the old ban - jo.
Fee fie fid-dle-ee - i - o, Fee fie fid-dle-ee - i - o, —
Fee fie fid-dle-ee - i - o, Strum - min' on the old ban - jo.

SINGING

Introduce students to the rhythm of this work song by having them swing imaginary hammers during the first four lines of the song. (See the PLAYING section for ideas about rhythm.) This is a perfect example of a 4/4 meter with the strong beat on the first count of each measure. Make up a descant or tenor line such as that sung around the campfire in community singing. Begin on a pitch a third higher, but let the ear guide where other pitches should be sung. Perhaps the parents of some students have done this and can help older students harmonize this part.

PLAYING

Hold a triangle on the metal part rather than suspending it, and hit it strongly with the metal striker simulating the sound of the hammer on the rails. Find a rhythm that is realistic for the swinging of the heavy hammer. Would it be two beats per measure or one? (Most likely, one.) Blow train whistles in appropriate places in the “Dinah, won’t you blow” sections. Use the autoharp to simulate the string sound of the banjo in the last sections, unless you have an actual banjo!

CREATING

Make up actions to fit each section of the song. Consider swinging hammers, pulling the horn, eating in the kitchen, and strumming the banjo. Or delineate the sections with simple hand jive movements.

Find other songs about railroads and trains such as *Utah’s Iron Horse*, *When the Train Comes Along*, *Little Red Caboose*, *This Train*, *Get On Board*, or any others that could be combined into a medley, a rondo, or a complete musical/narrative production celebrating the effect of the railroads in our country.

LISTENING

Search for recordings of musical compositions about trains. One colorful classical work is Arthur Honegger’s “Pacific 231” found in the Silver Burdett music series as well as in commercial sources. Additional “train music” can be found in the jazz idiom, “Night Train,” with such artists as Buddy Morrow and Oscar Peterson, and the fiddle tune “Orange Blossom Special.” Look in your library or on the internet for both of these. There may be some talented violin students in your school who can play the latter.

Banjo music would also be appropriate to enjoy, particularly if the students are not acquainted with the sound of the banjo. Again, search the libraries or internet, or ask if there is someone in the school community who could perform the banjo live for the students.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

Much credit is due to the railroads for what we enjoy today. Utahns have strong reasons to celebrate the coming of the railroad particularly because of the joining of the transcontinental railway at Promontory Point in 1869. Music helps us all remember and celebrate the great events of our country. Encourage students to find music and songs about railroads and trains realizing that they never would have been created if it hadn’t been for the coming of the rails.

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